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ABSTRACT

The Churches Commission on Education is an Australian interdenominational body committed to developing holistic programs for student well-being in the government school system. School chaplains provide a formal Christian presence, pastoral care, and counselling, and often work on programs for students with social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties. A history of the commission's Wilderness Intervention Programs from 1993 to the present shows the evolution of the current model, which combines wilderness experiences with cognitive-behavioral models of psychology and pastoral care approaches to relationship-building and mentoring. The programs work with high school students with poor self-concept, special education students, low-achieving students, students at risk for depression, and students with truancy or behavioral problems. The wilderness experience involves up to 10 days of bushwalking, abseiling, and canoeing and provides a catalyst for the ongoing mentoring relationship between student and chaplain. School psychologists have measured social, emotional, or behavioral changes resulting from the programs, using standardized tests. Although statistical results have been mixed, observed social benefits from the programs include decreased "acting out" in class and improved relationships with peers, teachers, and family. Spin-off benefits include a unique experience, mastery of certain outdoor skills, and increased motivation and satisfaction. (Contains 19 references.) (TD)

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The Wilderness Intervention Program: Change through Mentoring

By Laurie Haynes & Stephen Gallagher

There is nothing new about wilderness programs. Schools have used the ideas of John Dewey and Kurt Hahn in their experiential programs (Berman & Davis-Berman, 1995; Warner, 1990) for many years. Since the 1960s when Outward Bound programs in the United States increased in popularity, interest in the therapeutic use of the wilderness environment has increased substantially (Davis-Berman, Berman, & Capone, 1994). Ewert (1987) has neatly categorised therapeutic outdoor programs under social benefits, benefits to the individual, and wilderness experience programs. The Churches Commission on Education Wilderness Intervention Programs (WIP) aim to develop lasting personal change in the lives of high school students and provide benefits to the individual through increased self-concept, more internal locus of control, and reduced depressive tendencies. The social benefits from the WIP include decreased "acting out" behaviour in class, improved relationships with peers and teachers, and improved family relationships. Spin-offs include a unique experience, mastery of certain outdoor skills, and increased motivation and satisfaction.

Most of the empirical research in the field of therapeutic wilderness programs is in the areas of social benefits and benefits to the individual. This paper presents a description of the WIP program and an evaluative research project utilising an experimental design. In a review of wilderness programs focusing on mental illness, Kelley (1993) suggests that therapeutic wilderness treatment is innovative and potentially powerful as an adjunct to psychotherapy. When designing programs for clients with psychological difficulties it appears that a combination of wilderness experience and other treatments is potentially most beneficial. It makes sense that wilderness programs providing significant follow-up and a systemic approach facilitate lasting personal change in their participants. The WIP endeavour to provide this in the school context.

History and Evolution

In 1993 the first WIP was designed and implemented at Safety Bay Senior High School, in the state of Western Australia. Six 14-year-old boys were selected for their serious behavioural problems and their likelihood of early school dropout. The students

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completed a five-day bushwalking expedition in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park in the southwest of the state with the school chaplain and two teachers. This experience became the catalyst for a mentoring relationship between the staff and the students, with each member of staff mentoring two students. The school hoped to see some positive changes in the behaviour and attitudes of these six boys.

In 1994 Safety Bay Senior High School funded a similar program. Again, students were selected for their serious behaviour problems. This was done through referrals from teachers and the student services team. Five boys and three girls participated in the bushwalking expedition used the previous year. The expedition planning and program aims and objectives are reported elsewhere (see Haynes, 1994). A greater effort was made to define the mentoring relationships between the staff and students after the expedition. Teachers noticed some behavioural changes; however, these changes were not quantified.

In 1995 funding was obtained through the Student-At-Risk Program of the Education Department to implement the WIP program at Rockingham Senior High School. Training workshops in the use of nondirect intervention techniques were provided by South Coast Wilderness Enhanced Programs (Handley, 1990, 1993) for the chaplain and two teachers. Five boys and three girls aged fourteen years were selected for an eight-day bushwalking expedition in the Murchison River National Park in the midwest of the state. The students selection was based on teacher behaviour reports (or green slips) and the time spent in the withdrawal room at school. The wilderness experience and follow-up mentoring program aimed to reduce the number of green slips and withdrawals. The teachers' work load and yearlong industrial bans on extracurricular activities hindered the mentoring relationships and the results were disappointing.

Later in 1995, a combined school chaplains' approach to the WIP program was piloted. It was anticipated that chaplains with their more flexible job description in the school would be able to participate in a longer wilderness experience. This would reduce pressure on school resources. Chaplains would also be able to participate more actively than teachers would in the follow-up mentoring. Rockingham, Como, and Carine Senior High Schools sent two students each. The participants and the three chaplains completed a ten-day expedition in the Stirling Ranges National Park, near Albany. The nondirect intervention model was adopted because the students were selected on the basis of their behavioural problems. Applying the model became difficult as the environment, although spectacular and rugged, did not lend itself to a true wilderness experience. These difficulties left an impact on the follow-up mentoring with some students uncommitted to a mentoring relationship.

For the WIP program to continue as a useful tool for school chaplains it was decided that the focus needed to be placed on the mentoring relationship. One of the selection criteria for students needed to be a potential to respond to such a relationship. Chaplains could do what they do best — pastoral care — and they could adopt a wilderness model that was compatible with follow-up mentoring. Thirteen and fourteen year-old students would benefit mostly from the potential long-term mentoring. Various populations of students were anticipated including students with poor self-concept, students at risk for depression, special education students, low achieving students, students with truancy issues, and students with behavioural problems.

In 1996 a second pilot program, taking into account the factors described, was implemented. Twelve boys aged 13 years were referred by teachers and student services staff from Como and Carine Senior High Schools because of their perceived poor self-concept. The students, the two school chaplains, and a volunteer designed and

implemented a ten-day program in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park. The program involved six days of bushwalking, one day of abseiling, and three days of canoeing. A nonstandardised self-concept indicator (Haynes, 1994) developed for the WIP program was used to record baseline and follow-up data. Although statistical results were mixed, a greater rapport and relationship was developed between students and chaplains and the mentoring process began successfully.

In 1997 a significant amount of state funding has enabled the development of the WIP program in twelve government high schools. The wilderness experiences will involve combining two or three schools. Programs will be tailored to the needs of the students and schools. Group mentorship will be used in some schools prior to the wilderness experience and one-to-one mentorship will follow. School psychologists have the opportunity to measure social, emotional, or behaviour changes using standardised parametric tests.

The WIP Model

As a result of the history and evolution of the WIP, a combination of approaches have been adopted based on cognitive-behavioural models of psychology (Haynes, 1996) and pastoral care approaches to relationship building and mentoring.

Adventure based counselling (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988) and nondirect intervention (Handley, 1990, 1993) are the two main approaches used in the wilderness component of the programs. Adventure based counselling has its roots in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), and nondirect intervention in cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). These approaches are used according to the goals and objectives of each particular program.

Social learning theory asserts that behaviour is learned through role modelling and reinforcement. Features of adventure based counselling include role modelling and positive reinforcement, experiential learning, structured problem solving, "peak" experiences, use of metaphor, and transfer of learning. A greater weighting is put on this model when used with students who have a poor self-concept or who are at risk of depression.

Cognitive dissonance theory is based on the premise that people seek to harmonise their behaviour and in a situation of intellectual conflict will change their behaviour to reduce the tension. Features of nondirect intervention include tension and conflict, personal responsibility, consequential learning, self-understanding, wilderness as therapist, and questions instead of answers. A greater weighting is put on this model when used with students with severe behavioural problems.

The wilderness provides a sense of achievement and an experience remembered for life. The experience is used as a catalyst in an ongoing mentoring relationship between the student and chaplain. Life metaphors of journeying through difficult times, confronting and dealing with challenges, and seeking help and support from peers along the way are reinforced in the follow-up mentoring. A wilderness journal written by the chaplains provides a narrative of the daily events and becomes a useful tool for reflecting on particular behaviours and processes in the mentoring phase.

The one-to-one mentoring relationship involves: (a) developing a relationship where short and long-term goals are explored; (b) monitoring self-esteem and behaviour through contact with parents, teachers, and student services staff and pastoral care staff; (c)

helping students take concrete steps towards problem solving and crisis resolution and, if necessary, referral to a school psychologist, crisis support agencies or both; (d) facilitating relationship building with peers, parents, and teachers; (e) exploring networks of community resources such as recreational, sporting, and hobby clubs, services and agencies for young people, holiday programs and camps, and personal development programs; (f) maintaining a solution-focused approach to issues and concerns; and (g) collecting evaluations and report writing. The mentoring stage of the program is regarded as the most crucial in facilitating long-term personal change.

Chaplaincy: A Systemic Approach

The Churches Commission on Education is an interdenominational body, which provides a Christian presence in secondary schools by coordinating the Chaplaincy Program. The Churches Commission on Education is committed to developing holistic programs for student well being in the government school system.

School chaplains have been involved in pastoral care in Western Australian schools since 1982 (Berlach & Thornber, 1993). Currently there are over 65 chaplains in state schools, with one quarter of these in full-time positions. As well as providing a formal Christian presence in the school community, chaplains participate in a wide range of school activities including pastoral care and counselling. Chaplains are usually qualified in theology, education, counselling, or youth work and often work on programs for students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. Many chaplains consider mentoring a strategic tool for journeying with a small group of students, their families, and their teachers through unpredictable terrain.

The essence of chaplaincy is relational. The purpose of the chaplain in the school system is to express a relationship with God, the church community, the wider community, school staff and administration, parents and caregivers, and with students. Developing interdependence is one of the major themes.

Chaplains are not driven by programs. In their work, they are free to utilise programs that aim to enhance relationships at all levels of the system. The WIP is a program in which relationship building through mentoring is considered central. This is reflected in the motto, *change through mentoring*. Staff in pastoral care and student services often battle on without the support of holistic programs such as this one.

The disturbing picture of an adolescent struggling with social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties is further frustrated by a sense of staff hopelessness because of limited available resources. Staff in pastoral care and in student services often feel like they are trying to "probe a black hole" when working with a student. This feeling is accentuated when there is little opportunity for reference to family or community influences. The prevailing dynamic is often reactive. Regardless of the wisdom, which points to engaging in dialogue with other players in the system, constraints on resources often leave staff in a reactive mentality rather than a preventative one. Chaplains fill this void and allow for a shift in perspective to a preventative model where there is time to engage parents, extended family members, and significant others.

The role of the school chaplain can be crucial in working with the dynamics of a complex system like the school, family, or community. Through their interaction with the system the chaplain's presence can influence personal change their flexibility and availability allow for the creation of changes in the equilibrium. The shifts in power,

realignments of perception, and generation of energy can alter the homeostasis of a system in a way that allows for an interdependence that is healing.

Healing in a mentoring program is characterised by the return to primary relationships, which naturally leads to the therapeutic treatment of the individual. Allowing for individuality and differences, and defining one's identity relationally within a system's context, largely accounts for such healing.

Current Research

An evaluative study is currently being undertaken for the WIP at Como and Kewdale Senior High Schools. The project investigates the effects of a ten-day WIP with six follow-up group sessions on the self-concepts and attributional and coping styles of 13-year-old girls in year eight at school.

The selection process for the WIP program involved all the year eight students completing two psychometric tests: the Children's Self-Concept Scale (CSCS) (Piers, 1984), and the Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire, (CASQ) (Seligman, Kaslow, Alloy, Peterson, Tanenbaum, & Abramson, 1984). A correlation allowed for twenty girls from each school with the lowest scores on both measures to be included in the initial selection. A nonstandardised teacher rating scale was used to make the final selection of twelve girls from each school. Based on their scores on the CSCS and the CASQ the girls were matched into experimental and control groups. A third parametric measure the Adolescent Coping Scale; (ACS) (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993) was administered prior to the wilderness experience.

The twelve girls, two chaplains, and a volunteer staff member undertook a ten-day wilderness expedition in the Walpole region of the state's southwest. The expedition involved six days of bushwalking, one day of abseiling, and three days of canoeing. A combination of adventure based counselling and nondirect intervention was used. The first of the six group sessions will begin in mid 1997. The CSCS will be administered again after the wilderness experience to measure the effect of the wilderness experience on the girls' self-concept.

The aim of the group-mentoring stage of this particular WIP is to develop coping skills through the use of optimism techniques (Seligman, 1995), and experiential groupwork. The latter includes trust building, cooperation, and problem solving activities (Rohnke, 1984, 1989; Rohnke & Butler, 1995). The CSCS, CASQ, and the ACS will be repeated after the six group sessions to evaluate the final effects of the program on self-concept, and attributional and coping styles.

It is hypothesised that self-concept scores will increase after the wilderness experience and be maintained throughout the group sessions. Attributional and coping styles are also expected to increase as a result of the program as a whole.

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